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# What the U.S. achieved in Libya

ANALYSIS BY NILES LATHEM, Washington Bureau Chief

THE roughing up of some Libyan patrol boats and the destruction of a Soviet-built missile site does not seem to amount to much when talking about the spoils of victory.

However, victory is exactly what Reagan administration officials are claiming in this week's high seas shootout in the Gulf of Sidra.

As the first phase of Operation Prairie Fire against Libya appeared to be winding down last night, administration officials claimed that President Reagan had struck an important psychological blow in the war against terrorism.

Meanwhile, critics across the political spectrum are wondering out loud whether the risks of inflaming the radical Arab world into new acts of terrorism are justified while virtually no damage was done to the Libyan military and its terrorist infrastructure.

The administration, however, believes that after years of simply taking it on the chin when terrorists attack, Reagan demonstrated that the U.S. can extract a price for future terrorism.

In the view of senior White House and State Dept. officials, the U.S. also can claim other important accomplishments in its long-range plans to deal with Libyan strongman Moammar Khadafy — even if no more shots are fired in the Gulf of Sidra.

These include:

Driving a wedge between Khadafy and his chief sponsor, the Soviet Union.

There were clear signals

this week that the Kremlin, which has long regarded Libya as an important client in its campaign to limit American influence in the Mideast, abandoned Khadafy in his showdown with Reagan.

A top Soviet diplomat was invited to the State Dept. Sunday night for a briefing on U.S. plans in the Gulf of Sidra and came away with a clear picture of what Reagan's intentions were.

The Soviet Union, which had several ships tailing the U.S. task force, could have been of enormous help to Khadafy in this week's showdown.

Instead, the Soviets urged him not to provoke a retaliation from the 6th Fleet.

The result: Khadafy, who receives \$5 billion a year in Soviet military aid, gets a black eye from both Reagan and his chief sponsors, and the Kremlin gets a strong message about the seriousness of American resolve to protect its interests.

Vital intelligence data on Libya's military and terrorist network.

The naval task force has been stationed off the coast of Libya since last

December and has employed its vast and sophisticated electronic intelligence tools to great advantage.

With the use of overflights by spy aircraft carrying sophisticated surveillance equipment, the U.S. has managed to break Libyan defense codes and pinpoint locations of key Libyan air force and missile defense bases and terrorist training camps with great accuracy.

This has enabled the Pen-

tagon to devise precise plans to take them out should that become necessary.

Administration officials also say cryptically that it is no coincidence that there has not been a single terrorist strike by Libya against American or Israeli targets since the task force steamed into the Gulf of Sidra area.

Successfully challenging Khadafy's territorial claim to the Gulf of Sidra.

By crossing Khadafy's "line of death" and keeping U.S. ships in Libyan-claimed waters for nearly 48 hours without a single shot being fired by Libya after its futile attempts to stop the fleet, the adminis-

tration believes it has made great strides in reopening the area for safe navigation by commercial shipping and air travel.

Undermining Khadafy politically at home.

Although Khadafy has whipped up anti-American war fever in Libya, administration officials believe that the shellacking he took in this week's naval operations will have enormous long-range consequences.

Khadafy's biggest domestic vulnerability is with his military leadership, many of whom are growing increasingly disenchanted with his adventurous policies and who are the only Libyans who know what actually happened in the Gulf of Sidra this week.

Also, giving Khadafy a black eye in his own backyard is certain to give Libyan dissident movements throughout the world new momentum.

With Khadafy's defense network weakened, his relations with Moscow strained and his ability to launch terrorist attacks around the globe hampered by increased American vigilance and determination, administration officials believe that Khadafy has been significantly damaged by this week's operation.

In addition, top White House officials say that Operation Prairie Fire has not necessarily been completed.

If Khadafy decides to escalate the fighting, Reagan has other options for even harsher military measures that he would not hesitate to use.